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SERMON BY THE RIGHT REV. JOHN H. HOBART, D. D.

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ON HEAVENLY WISDOM.

A Sermon,

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The following Sermon, delivered by Bishop Hobart at Auburn, on the 2d of Sept. 1830, was the last he ever preached.

Proverbs i. 7.—"*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*"

RELIGION is so founded in the principles of human nature; so justified by the soundest dictates of reason; so conducive to our perfection and happiness here and hereafter, that it is frequently designated in the sacred writings by the term wisdom. The religious man is represented as the truly wise man. The fool only says in his heart there is no God—the workers of iniquity have no knowledge—while to depart from evil is understanding.

And yet, my brethren, how many are wise as it regards this world, and with respect to religion seem to have no understanding. How many exercise soundness of judgment in all matters of a temporal nature, who are either wholly indifferent or only partially attentive to those spiritual and eternal concerns, the pursuit and attainment of which alone designate the truly wise.

They who neglect religion are always ready to allege reasons to excuse or justify their neglect, and to rescue it from the odious imputation of folly.

These reasons let us now examine—let us test their soundness and their wisdom.

But it will be necessary previously to ascertain the character of those who, in an enlarged and complete sense, may be said to depart from evil; in other words, to exhibit the character of the truly religious.

According to the terms proposed in the Gospel, the truly religious are they who exercise repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ; who, admitted by baptism into that Church which the Holy Spirit of Christ as its head animates, secure the continual influences of that Spirit by devout participation of the ministrations and ordinances of this church, especially of the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, and faithfully apply the grace received to their renovation and sanctification; who created anew unto good works, put off the old man, the body of sin, and put on the new man in righteousness and holiness; who love not the world nor the things of the world, except in subordination to the higher pursuits of piety and holiness, and the more exalted joys of the heavenly inheritance, and who thus live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world. They only who, as far as human infirmity will admit, are guided by these principles, and are supremely devoted to these divine and spiritual objects, are truly religious, according to the terms of the Gospel. They who neglect religion, as thus renovating the heart and regulating the conduct, are ready to extenuate or to justify their neglect by various reasons.

I. Some will wholly deny the necessity of a religious life—If they do not reject the being of a God, they make him an unconcerned spectator of the actions of his intelligent creatures; they disbelieve his moral government, and do not regard him as a rewarder of the good and punisher of the wicked—and perhaps, when they advance thus far, in perfect consistency they go the full length of this dreary career of infidelity, and place the termination of the present life in oblivion. Alas, gloomy and shocking as is this profligate skepticism, it is to be feared that among the mass of sinners, of those who entirely neglect the

concerns of religion, and live in devotion to sensual gratifications, there are some who in these skeptical principles find refuge from the remorse and guilty apprehensions of conscience. How are we to awaken these impugners of God and of religion to a sense of their folly? If in opposition to all the principles of their nature, all that conscience can suggest, all that reason can urge, if in defiance of all the hopes and desires of their immortal spirits, all the experience, the wisdom and the testimony of the world, they reject those sacred truths to which God hath set his seal in the signs and wonders and mighty works that accompanied his dispensation of grace and mercy—by what arguments shall their delusion be removed, and their deadened consciences quickened? Miserable men! their conduct is the extreme of folly—for they rest their escape from intolerable and endless wo, not on that which alone should satisfy, in a case of this infinite moment, a wise and prudent man, absolute certainty, but on doubtful deductions and profligate hopes. And in cherishing them they have prostrated all those principles and conclusions which are sanctioned by the reason and the feelings of mankind. What if there should be a God who awards the felicity and the wo of eternity! what if this eternity should succeed the present uncertain and short existence! what, if as the just punishment of their abandoned principles and conduct, in that eternity the worm that never dies, and the fire which is never quenched, should be the portion of the contemners of God and of his authority! All this is at least possible, and the mere *possibility* of this tremendous result, brands with the extreme of folly, a conduct which thus *may* terminate in misery inconceivable and interminable. We admit for a moment all the reasonings of skepticism—they cannot prove the *impossibility* of a future retribution; and if there be that retribution, if there be hereafter a tribunal on which the Maker and Ruler of the universe sits in judgment, and awards the destinies of eternity, what tremendous punishment must he inflict on those who, in opposition to all the light of their reason, all the feelings of their nature, all the belief of the world, in opposition to God's own testimony in the Gospel of his Son, cherished that skepti-

cism which wrested from him his throne of just dominion, his tribunal of righteous judgment, his sceptre of mercy and of wrath, and rushed into all the excesses of sensual gratification, like the brutes that perish, believing, fearing, hoping nothing beyond the grave.

II. There is a different class of men who are guilty of neglecting religion, not through speculative but practical infidelity, arising from the love of sensual gratification. These constitute the large mass of the ungodly. Those who finding the laws of God, and an attention to the concerns of religion, incompatible with the gratification of their sinful passions, reject and neglect them, and thus live without God in the world. Their conduct, (thoughtless and ungodly men) is the extreme of folly; they do not deny that there is a God who witnesses and who records their actions; they do not deny that there is a judgment to come, where all their actions will be brought to the view of an assembled universe, and to the bar of eternal justice; they do not deny that God has denounced indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish against the workers of iniquity, and that at the day of account, the fearful sentence of his justice will be executed upon them, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"—and yet while these truths receive their speculative assent, they practically deny them. They live as if there were no God who witnessed their actions—no judgment where these actions will be disclosed—no tribunal of eternal justice—no sentence of eternal reprobation; they live, fulfilling only the lusts of the flesh, and the desires of their corrupt minds—they live rebels against their God, against Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell—they live objects of his displeasure, exposed to the sentence of his wrath—they thus live, when this night their soul may be required of them; this night death may seal them up to the judgment of the great day—this night may fix their doom of misery for ever! Is not their conduct the extreme of folly?

III. There are some who not inattentive to the concerns of religion, still fall short of its claims—they do not deem necessary that holy fervour of spirit which the infinitely interesting

truths and exercises of religion are calculated to excite; or undervalue, or perhaps neglect those moral virtues without which the religion of feeling becomes either hypocrisy or enthusiasm; or those ordinances by which communion is maintained with the church, the mystical body of the Redeemer, through which he preserves and nourishes us with his grace and mercy, and fits us for the joys of the Church triumphant. The former class, those who are deficient in devout, and holy, and lively affections, in what may be called the inward power of godliness, think that they fulfil all the requisitions of religion, if in their conduct to their fellow men they are just and charitable, and if in reference to God, they render him homage by attending his worship, and abstain from gross violations of his laws. They do not cherish an awful sense of his constant presence with them and holy inspection of their conduct—their hearts are not warmed with a sense of his goodness, and with lively love for his character and perfections. They have probably never sufficiently realized their numerous imperfections and sins, nor been sufficiently sensible of the weakness and corruption of their nature; and therefore do not cherish that humble reliance on the merits and grace of the Redeemer, which alone convey consolation and holiness to the soul. Satisfied principally with decency of conduct, they do not direct their attention and their efforts through the divine Spirit to the great business of the Christian calling, the renovation and sanctification of the affections and powers of their fallen nature; not regarding with lively faith and hope, Heaven as their home, nor having their hearts surely there fixed, they are principally and supremely occupied with the pursuits and pleasures of the present life. Superficial and imperfect Christians, serious is your mistake, and great is your folly. You expect to serve God and to obtain his favour, while you fall far short of the requisitions of his holy word. To this word appeal; by this word test your Christian pretensions. Give me thy heart, is the requisition of God, a requisition necessary and reasonable, for there can be no acceptable obedience which the heart does not animate; and he who is the greatest and the best of beings, and to whom you must

trace all your enjoyments, has a supreme claim to your hearts. Give me thy heart, is his just and reasonable demand. Where are their hearts fixed, supremely on him and his service, or more upon their worldly pursuits and pleasures? Love not the world nor the things of the world—If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, is the injunction and declaration of your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. And this precept forbids nothing, if it does not forbid such a pursuit of worldly objects, and such an indulgence in worldly pleasure, as occupy our affections, engross our time, or weaken our pious emotions, and withdraw our hearts from the supreme love and pursuit of divine things, of the joys and glories of our heavenly inheritance. Christians of the description whom I am now addressing, what in this respect is the state of your hearts and conduct—are you more desirous of advancement and prosperity in the world, than of the favour of God and of securing your heavenly inheritance? Are you more gratified with the joys of the world, than with the exercises and consolations of religion, and the anticipated bliss of those heavenly mansions for which you are destined? Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, do we see you passing the limits of moderate and innocent indulgence, and eagerly pursuing worldly pleasure as a principal business of life, and sacrificing at its altar the purity of your affections, and the strength and fervour of your pious principles and hopes—Ah, is it not folly thus to expect to serve God and mammon? Thus to be lovers of pleasure, and yet lovers of God—thus to be devoted to the world, and yet to have our conversation and our hopes in Heaven—look at the word of God; this word commands us to aim at being pure as God is pure, at being perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect, at being transformed by the renewing of our mind, at being sanctified by the Spirit of God, at setting our affections on things above. Let us seriously test our character and pretensions by the rule of Christian morals and piety laid down in the word of God—and we must perceive the folly of hoping for his favour and acceptance while we thus fall short of his holy requisitions.

Nor can we designate by a milder epithet than that of folly the conduct of those who err in an opposite extreme. Such are they who, lively, ardent, and frequent in their professions of love to God, of reliance on their Saviour, of sole dependence on his grace, and of being born of God by the Holy Spirit, are deficient in the cultivation of those moral virtues which are styled the fruits of the Spirit, and undervalue those ministrations and ordinances of the Church by which only their communion with its divine head is to be maintained, and their participation of the divine Spirit which animates it, secured. Look at those numerous exhortations of scripture which inculcate, as the essential characteristics of Christ's disciples, the cultivation of all the moral virtues, and learn the folly of calling your Saviour Lord, Lord, while you do not the things which he commands; and of pretending to love God whom you have not seen, while you love not your brother whom you have seen. Mark the uniform tenor of the declarations of Christ and his apostles, which make him the head of a mystical body which he loved, for which he gave himself, for which he purchased his Holy Spirit, to which all who believe in him must be united, in order to preserve their union with him, and in which he hath appointed ministers and ordinances by which this union is to be established and maintained. Hear him praying for the unity of his followers in that church against which he declares the gates of hell shall not prevail—Hear him instituting baptism as the sacrament of admission into this church, and the supper as the sacrament of communion with it—Hear him commissioning his apostles and their successors to the end of the world to be the ministers and rulers of this his mystical body. See the record—the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Hear the injunctions, repent and be baptized—eat this bread and drink this cup and show forth the Lord's death till he come—obey them that have the rule over you in the Lord, and submit yourselves—there should be no schism in the body. Mark them which cause divisions—note and hear all this, my brethren, and learn the extreme folly of separating what God hath joined together, evangelical piety and church order and communion. Learn the extreme folly of

the opinions too prevalent at the present day, which thus make all inquiries as to the duly constituted ministrations and ordinances of Christ's church matters of very inferior moment, and incompatible with the enlarged and liberal views which should distinguish Christians, which represent as of very little importance to what particular sect of the numerous parties into which Christians are divided, we attach ourselves, provided we possess true Christian faith, and which thus strikes out from the catalogue of sins, the deadly sin of schism, which consists in a causeless separation from the apostolic ministry of the church, but which if all who profess to be vested with the apostolic commission for the ministry do really enjoy it, is a sin which it is impossible to commit; since on this principle, union with any professed ministry wheresoever derived, or by whomsoever assumed will unite us with the church.

IV. There is a class of persons who attempt to excuse their inattention to religion, by the plea of worldly occupation.

They are not disposed to deny the importance and necessity of religion, nor to undervalue its consolations and its hopes. They are not ignorant of the nature of its claims, of the necessity of an active repentance, of a lively faith, of an holy obedience through divine grace to all the statutes and ordinances of the gospel, in order to obtain a title to the favour of God. But for their neglect of the things that belong to their eternal peace, they offer as an excuse their necessary attention to their worldly business. But is it possible that God hath so ordered the constitution of the world, and so established the terms and duties of salvation, that a supreme attention to this most important of all concerns is incompatible with a necessary attention to those temporal concerns which no wise man ought to neglect? My brethren, an inspired apostle hath united, the three characteristics of the Christian "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Godliness having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come, a supreme attention to securing the one, not being incompatible with the pursuit and reasonable enjoyment of the other. Doubtless the world may be inordinately pursued—we may be too

much occupied with its business and its concerns, and when *thus* occupied, we may not have time nor inclination for the concerns of religion. But this inordinate occupation with the things of the world is not reasonable, is not correct, is not necessary to our success, is indeed incompatible with our real enjoyment of the world—for that incessant attention, and those harassing cares, that disqualify us for the duties and joys of religion, unfit us also for the real enjoyment of the world. Here, as in every other case, God hath mercifully connected our duty with our happiness. And he only really enjoys the world who pursues it in that moderation, and with those well regulated desires, which permit him to devote his supreme solicitude to the concerns of his salvation, and to securing that favour of God, which while it enriches him with comforts that the world can neither give nor take away, blesses to him all the virtuous enjoyments of the present life.

Lastly. We hear as the most frequent excuse for the neglect of religion, a determination to attend to it at some future period.

Most foolish and most dangerous of all excuses, an excuse which in any temporal matter of importance, a wise man would be ashamed to offer. Religion, the most important of all concerns, and yet we defer it! My brethren, how long shall be this delay, how long this indecision? We have deferred from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood perhaps to old age, an attention to the things that belong to our eternal peace, and are we now more disposed to this attention than heretofore? are we not perhaps more reluctant to engage in the business of our salvation, or less sensible of its infinite importance? If we go on in this state of indecision, what are we to expect? Death will find us undecided, eternity will receive us unprepared, judgment will overtake us, impenitent, unholy. My brethren, our safety lies in decision. In religious as in temporal matters, the only remedy for delay is immediate action. Now then, this day, this hour, ye who have hitherto delayed, enter in earnest on the work of your salvation.

Brethren, this is the business of life, this is its comfort, and this alone will prepare us for eternity. In the present world, even

"great peace have they who love the law of God, and nothing shall offend them. To fear God and to keep his commandments is the whole of man's duty and his happiness; and at the last day, in the award of happiness to the righteous, and of misery to the wicked, the seal of eternity will be set to the truth of the declaration—that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

In order to fill out this number to a proper length, and there not being quite matter enough in the preceding discourse, we have, through the coincidence of one of the respected clergy of this city, taken up Bishop Hobart's Sermons, "On Redemption," and the following extract (in the 2d sermon of the 1st vol.) is so very beautiful, and so much to the point, that we give it without hesitation:—

"WHATSOEVER thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is neither work, nor labour, nor device, in the grave, whither thou art going."—(Eccles. ix. 10.) This is an admonition, which may be applied with peculiar force to the Christian. The duties of that holy calling which he is bound to discharge, and in the discharge of which he is patiently to look for everlasting rewards, are so numerous, so important, and so arduous, that they require the utmost exertion, and demand constant watchfulness and zeal. The uncertainty of the time when he will be summoned to give an account of his stewardship, should lead him to still greater vigilance and exertions. So strong are the ties which bind him to the service of his God; so weighty is the debt of gratitude which he owes to *Him*, who bought him with *His* blood; and so infinitely above his highest merits are the glorious rewards that await him; that he must be deeply sensible that the best service of the longest life will be too feeble to testify his allegiance and his gratitude to his God and Saviour. What a powerful motive, then, to the most ardent zeal, to the most active assiduity in our Christian calling, exists in the consideration, that perhaps the time will be even shorter than the usual course of human life, which is allotted us to show forth the loving-kindness of the Lord; and to glorify, by a holy life, our Redeemer and God. Let us then be vigilant and faithful, Christians, in the cultivation of the graces of our holy

profession, and in the discharge of its sacred duties. Let the uncertainty of the time, when our Lord will call us to his heavenly kingdom, quicken our pious affections, and increase our exertions in his service. The day of his coming will not then find us unprepared. The summons of death will be but the prelude to the joyful sentence from the lips of our Redeemer and Judge, "Well done, good and faithful servants. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

When we are not aware, the day of the Lord will come. And it is that day on which we are told, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."—(2 Pet. iii. 10.) "And the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God."—(1 Thess. iv. 16.)

"But who may abide the day of his coming? and who may stand when he appeareth?"—(Mal. iii. 2.)

If those heavens were *now* to be rolled up as a scroll, and depart away; if the elements around us were *now* to melt with fervent heat; if the sun were now to be turned into blackness, and the moon into blood; if these portentous events were *now* to occur, and to announce the second coming of the Saviour of the world, what would be our emotions! The prospect of that day, when, with an assembled universe, we are to stand at the tribunal of the Judge of quick and dead, and receive our eternal doom, sometimes fills us with apprehension and terror. And if even the anticipation of the awful scenes of the last judgment, feebly as imagination portrays them, be thus dismaying, what emotions will the awful reality excite? Let us prepare—Oh! let us prepare, for the coming of our Lord. For he will come in a day that we think not of, and in an hour that we are not aware.

Christians, be always ready—always watchful, diligent, instant in prayer—steadfast to your God, walking in his commandments and ordinances blameless, and immoveable in faith, though the temptations and the sorrows of the world assail you—always abounding in the work of the Lord—your loins girt, and your lamps burning, waiting in humble hope for his coming.—

Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find thus watching. Lift up your heads, O Christians, for the day of your complete redemption is come. Your Redeemer appears, to reward his saints, to confer everlasting gladness upon his people. He is come to wipe away all tears from your eyes—to lead you from the unsatisfying pleasures of the world, to "fountains of living water," those substantial joys that are at God's right hand for evermore. Hear him pronounce the sentence: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—(Matt. xxv. 34.) "Be ye always ready—for the Lord will come in a day when we look not for him, and in an hour when we are not aware."—(Matt. xxiv. 44, 50.)

SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

Methinks I hear the Archangels sound
The solemn trump aloud,
Calling the tribes on earthly ground
To meet their sov'reign, God.

He comes!—He comes!—around his throne
His martyr'd saints appear!
Ten thousands his great God-head own,
And shout it thro' the air.

The Sun observes his sov'reign nod,
And hides his evening ray,
While all the stars acknowledge God,
And give the Judgment way.

The bursting tombs give up their dead,
Nor keep them longer bound;
While flames of fire around them spread,
And thunders shake the ground.

The diff'rent tribes of heav'n and hell,
And seas and worlds abroad;
A number which no tongue can tell
Appear before their God.

On earth, by various names they went—
My soul!—what nations were?
But now—the sinner and the saint
Are all the names they bear.